

State of Washington
Natural Heritage Plan
April 2003

ABOUT THE COVER PHOTOS

Through the natural areas system, public agencies, private groups and individuals work together to protect Washington's rich and varied natural heritage for current and future generations.

Clockwise from top:

Bone River Natural Area Preserve (NAP) — Pacific Northwest Coast Ecoregion.
Trout Lake NAP — East Cascades Ecoregion.
Sabin's Lupine — Blue Mountains Ecoregion, photo by Karl Urban
Davis Canyon NAP — Okanogan Ecoregion.

Photos used in this publication were taken by DNR staff unless noted.

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State of Washington

Natural Heritage Plan

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Additional information related to this plan is on the web at:
www.dnr.wa.gov

"It is, therefore, the public policy of the State of Washington to secure for the people of present and future generations the benefit of enduring resource of natural areas."

RCW 79.70.010



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources
Doug Sutherland - Commissioner of Public Lands

ACRONYMS

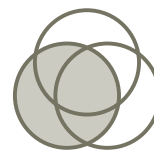
| | |
|-------|---|
| BLM | Bureau of Land Management |
| BSA | Biological Study Area |
| DNR | Washington State Department of Natural Resources |
| GAP | Gap Analysis Project |
| NAP | Natural Area Preserve |
| NRCA | Natural Resources Conservation Area |
| RCW | Revised Code of Washington |
| RNA | Research Natural Area |
| TNC | The Nature Conservancy |
| USFS | U.S. Forest Service |
| USFWS | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service |
| WAC | Washington Administrative Code |
| WDFW | Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife |
| WSU | Washington State University |

Dear Reader:

I am pleased to present to you the State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan. It is an important tool to help guide conservation in our state. As citizens of Washington state, we have been blessed with an incredible diversity of natural resources: ocean waters, conifer-covered slopes, volcanic peaks, shrub-steppe and grasslands, deep coulees, and more. As stewards of this rich natural heritage, it is our responsibility to retain it for future generations, so that they, too, can learn from it and enjoy it. The plan provides a framework for our efforts to be both efficient and effective.

Establishing natural areas is one way to ensure that our natural heritage is retained. Virtually all state and federal agencies with land management responsibilities have land-use designations that are designed to protect our native species and ecosystems. Conservation organizations have been active in securing protection for special places as well. Individual landowners also can make a significant contribution through good stewardship of their land.

Natural areas are an important part of providing healthy ecosystems, working landscapes and benefits for all the people of Washington – goals which we believe are overlapping and work together to complement the many activities that occur on private and public lands.



The Legislature entrusted DNR with the job of establishing a statewide system of natural areas. Our approach to that task is presented in this document, the eighth edition of the *State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan*. A goal for this edition was to make it more readable, and the message more compelling, than previous editions.

An overview of the current status of the statewide system of natural areas is presented and priorities for continued conservation effort are identified. The list of successes is impressive, but a lot of work remains. It will take cooperative, and perhaps innovative, efforts to build on our past successes. This plan is provided as a guide to those efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Doug-". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Doug Sutherland
Commissioner of Public Lands



**Revised Code of Washington,
Chapter 79.70 (Natural Area
Preserves Act)**

“ All areas within the state, except those which are expressly dedicated by law for preservation and protection in their natural condition, are subject to alteration by human activity. Natural lands, together with the plants and animals living thereon in natural ecological systems, are valuable for the purposes of scientific research, teaching, as habitats of rare and vanishing species, as places of natural historic and natural interest and scenic beauty, and as living museums of the original heritage of the state.

It is, therefore, the public policy of the State of Washington to secure for the people of present and future generations the benefit of an enduring resource of natural areas by establishing a system of natural area preserves, and to provide for the protection of these natural areas.

”

◀ Table Mountain Natural Resources
Conservation Area in Skamania County.

Geology and climate have interacted through time to create a wonderful variety of landscapes and environments within the state of Washington. Residents and visitors alike identify Washington with its scenic beauty. But there is much more than just scenic beauty. There is a great diversity of ecosystems and species.

From the rainforests of the Olympic Peninsula to the arid lands of the central Columbia Basin, and from the ridges and peaks of the Cascade and Olympic mountains to the valleys and plains below, Washington is blessed with a tremendous natural heritage.

In 1972, the Washington State Legislature recognized that our natural heritage (i.e., the native species and ecosystems of the state) could be adversely affected by human activities. The Legislature also recognized that there were many benefits to retaining unaltered ecosystems and the plants and animals living within them. These benefits included, among others, having places for scientific research and education and providing habitat for rare and vanishing species.

The passage of the Natural Area Preserves Act (RCW 79.70) in 1972 paved the way for the development of a statewide system of natural areas. The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) was authorized to establish and manage this system. DNR was directed to cooperate with federal, state and local agencies, private organizations and individuals to ensure a truly statewide system. Today, the statewide natural areas system consists of lands managed by numerous federal and state agencies and private conservation organizations.

NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM MANDATE

- Maintain a classification of the state's natural heritage resources.
- Maintain an inventory of the locations of these resources.
- Share the information with agencies, organizations and individuals for environmental assessment and land management purposes.
- Assist with the nomination and selection of sites for inclusion within the statewide system of natural areas.

Natural Heritage Program

In 1981, the Legislature amended the Natural Area Preserves Act and established the Natural Heritage Program within DNR. The Natural Heritage Program was developed to provide a scientific approach to the process of identifying candidate sites for the natural areas system.

Natural Heritage Plan

DNR's Natural Heritage Program is required by law to prepare a Natural Heritage Plan, and update it biennially. The purpose of this plan is to provide the framework for a statewide system of natural areas. The first *State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan* was completed in 1983. The basic criteria and process by which natural areas are selected have not changed significantly since that first edition. The criteria and process are outlined in Part 3 of this document. Natural area selection is driven by the presence of priority ecosystems and species. Lists of these priorities are available on the Natural Heritage Program's website at: www.dnr.wa.gov (click on the site map/index). These lists are also available in hard copy upon request. They reflect an up-to-date assessment of overall conservation priorities and the priorities for inclusion within the statewide system of natural areas.

However, the science of conservation biology has changed significantly since the completion of the first *State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan*. Not only are more agencies, organizations and private landowners involved in conservation, but our understanding of what it takes to conserve our native species and ecosystems has improved. In particular, more attention is paid to how landscape context might affect the viability of the priority species and ecosystems present within a potential natural area.

The *State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan* provides the framework for a statewide system of natural areas by:

- identifying the criteria and process by which natural areas are selected,
- identifying priority ecosystems and species for protection,
- outlining methods of protection, and
- identifying the roles of agencies / organizations in natural area protection.

The 2003 edition of the *State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan* reflects current trends in conservation thinking and conservation action and clarifies the role of the statewide system of natural areas in that overall effort.



What You Will Find in This Plan

- Brief descriptions of the biological diversity of Washington State, including the major threats to that biodiversity
- Information about the statewide system of natural areas and the role that such areas play in the overall conservation effort in the state
- The current status of the statewide system of natural areas
- The process of assigning priorities to species and ecosystems and the process of selecting sites for addition to the statewide system.

▲ Castle Rock Natural Area Preserve in Grant County, jointly managed by the State Parks and Recreation Commission and DNR.